A group of four friends sit at an oval table on the third floor of Gutman Library. Instead of gathering over a cup of coffee, as most friends might, they are gathered around a large microphone and a tangle of wires. Ed.L.D. students SHANNA PEEPLES, ADRIANA CHAVARIN-LOPEZ, JIM MERCER, and ADAM PARROTT-SHEFFER are talking about the importance of storytelling as a political act. But this isn’t the usual Ed School conversation about education as a force of change. This conversation will be recorded, edited, and downloaded in the form of a podcast for listeners across the country.

The group started Pedagogy of the Obsessed as their final project for one of Associate Professor Jal Mehta’s classes. The idea came to them at Petsi Pies after reading the work of educator Paolo Freire. How could they come up with a way to start examining the system constructively? Each member put together an episode that focused on their area of expertise. Peeples took on what makes an effective teacher. Chavarin-Lopez looked at leadership sustainability. Mercer focused on leadership development, Parrott-Sheffer on early childhood education.

Without much prior knowledge of podcasting, they drew on their backgrounds to bootstrap the project together. Mercer was a DJ and has a nephew who is into recording, so he’s in charge of sound and created a jingle. Chavarin-Lopez’s daughter helps with Garage Band. Peeples was 2015 National Educator of the Year and brings in guests like former Secretary of Education John King. Parrott-Sheffer coordinates scheduling.

While all four creators have worked as teachers and in leadership positions, bringing in other voices is a goal. In one episode, they talked with students about the importance of having an out teacher. They’ve brought in parents to discuss special education. And the nature of a podcast helps draw in an audience.

“What I love about a podcast is that it’s literally a voice in your head. There’s an intimacy that comes with podcasting and radio,” Peeples says. “A lot of our stories talk about risk and loss and vulnerability, and podcasting brings that alive in people’s voices in a way that couldn’t happen if we wrote it.”

With 5,000 downloads, listeners in 38 states, and downloads in every continent except Antarctica, Pedagogy of the Obsessed has a wide reach and is being used to spark discussions in many schools and districts. Chavarin-Lopez, for example, posted an episode to a social media group for educators and got questions from principals asking about the topic of leader sustainability. “Just sparking that kind of conversation,” she says, “has been rewarding.”

Though the podcast is gaining an audience, all four students will be starting their residencies in 2019, and finding time to sit and talk will be challenging, Parrott-Sheffer says, but worth it.

“Even if it wasn’t being recorded, the conversations have been so valuable. On some level, it’s almost just selfish — we get together and chat. Those sorts of things make the stuff like getting it uploaded worthwhile.”

The group is confident that future Ed.L.D. students will continue these conversations.

“The biggest compliment will be if, years from now, we’re given the opportunity to participate in a podcast, having gone out and changed the ed sector,” Mercer says. “To be the subject of a podcast that’s still going on here would be great.”

EMILY BOUDREAU WILL BE GRADUATING THIS SPRING FROM THE EDUCATION POLICY AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM